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USSR SCIENTISTS MAKE RECORD BALLOON FLIGHT

On 30 October the Soviet press announced that the stratosphere balloon USSR VR-79 had established a new world record for balloons of its size by remaining in the air for 83 hours, 29 minutes, while covering a ground distance of 3,100 kilometers.

Newspaper articles on the flight appeared in 23 newspapers in 11 union republics. No mention of the flight was carried in newspapers in Leningrad and the Belorussian, Karelo-Finnish, Estonian, and Lithuanian SSRs. Nothing is known of the treatment of the flight in the Turkmen SSR paper, Turkmenskaya Iskra, since it is not available in CIA.

The flight was organized by the Central Aerological Observatory (Moscow), Main Administration of the Hydrometeorological Service under the Council of Ministers USSR. According to G. I. Golyshev, director of the observatory and Stalin Prize Laureate, its primary purpose was scientific study of the earth's atmosphere. (1) The balloon carried more than ten different types of scientific instruments intended for the study of solar radiation, absorption of solar energy by the atmosphere, dust content in the atmosphere, vertical movements and turbulence of air currents, etc. (2)

The crew of the USSR VR-79 consisted of Pilot First Class S. A. Zinoveyev, the commander; S. S. Gaygerov, Candidate of Geographical Sciences, and the scientific observer of the flight; and M. M. Kirpichev, the observatory short-wave operator. It was Zinoveyev's 196th ascent. He holds a world record for duration of flight in a small balloon -- 46 hours, 10 minutes -- established in spring 1941. Gaygerov and Pilot B. Nevernov had previously set a world record by remaining aloft in a balloon for 69 hours, 20 minutes, while covering a ground distance of 2,776 kilometers. (3) Gaygerov is a scientific associate of the observatory. (4) It was Kirpichev's first balloon flight. (3) All three crew members are Communists. (2)

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In addition to scientific equipment, the open gondola of the balloon carried a portable short-wave radio set, a 10-day supply of provisions in special wrappings, two 48-liter goatskin bags containing fresh water, parachutes, oxygen equipment, and more than $1\frac{1}{2}$ tons of ballast in sandbags. The 2,500-cubic-meter balloon carried a total weight of $2\frac{1}{2}$ tons.

The balloon and crew departed from the observatory's airfield in Moscow at 1041 on 25 October and proceeded toward Yelets and Voronezh, covering a ground distance of 550 kilometers the first night. At noon on 26 October, the balloon crossed the Don, and at dawn of the 27th, the Volga River, at a point south of Stalingrad. Blown by hurricane winds of up to 100 kilometers an hour, and traveling at an altitude of 3,000 meters, it took only 3 hours to pass over the Caspian Sea somewhere between the cities of Gur'yev and Astrakhan'. The balloon crosses the Aral Sea at about midnight on 27 October and continued on a course toward the Syr-Dar'ya River.

At dawn on 28 October, the balloon was in the Lake Balkhash region. Weather conditions -- snow and heavy overcast, which had hampered the balloon's flight from its inception -- began to worsen, causing the balloon to lose altitude. At 2120 that night, it passed over the Alma-Ata -- Semipalatinsk railroad line. At 2210 on 28 October, a successful landing was made near the "Kzyl-Tu" Collective Farm, Aksuskiy Rayon, Taldy-Kurgan Oblast, Kazakh SSR.(3)

In the course of its flight the balloon traveled at altitudes ranging between 2,000 and 4,000 meters.(5) From Moscow to the Volga, the balloon's average speed was 20 kilometers an hour, but it attained an average speed of 100 kilometers an hour between the Volga and the Aral Sea; on the last leg of its voyage, the balloon's speed averaged 60 kilometers an hour.(6)

Constant two-way short-wave radio contact was kept with the observatory at Moscow. Contact was also made with amateur DOSARM short-wave radio operators in Ryazan', Yerevan, and Moscow.(6)

Claims of two new world records were made for the flight, one for duration and distance of free flight in a Category 7 balloon. The USSR VR-79 belongs to this category as established by the International Air Federation (FAI). In addition, the USSR VR-79 is claimed to have broken a record set for Category 8 balloons for distance of flight -- 3,052 kilometers -- made by a German aeronaut in 1914.(2)

The crew trained for the flight in pressure chambers which artificially reproduced high-altitude 51c conditions. They were supervised in their training by Colonel of the Medical Service Pereskokov, doctor and physiologist.(6)

On hand to install and seal the balloon's barograph prior to the take-off were the members of the sports commission of the Central Air Club imeni Chkalov: A. Vishnyakov, secretary of the commission, S. Mushchenko, P. Polosukhin, and A. Krikin. Polosukhin and Krikin hold what is claimed to be a world high-altitude record of 11,688 meters, set by them on 27 April 1949 in the same USSR VR-79. As of last November, Polosukhin had 160 ascents to his record, of which 70 were experimental and scientific research, to heights of 10-12 kilometers. He had also made some 655 parachute jumps. As of that date also Krikin had 152 ascents to his credit, including a 16,800-meter airplane flight into the stratosphere.(7) The official starter for the flight was Engineer Karamyshev.(6)

Although the balloon landed in the Kazakh SSR, Kazakhstanskaya Pravda gave no additional information concerning the flight. In fact, it did not carry the story until 1 November; the following day it published an interview (8) with the three crew members who were in Alma-Ata on their way back to Moscow.

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3. Trud, 31 Oct 50
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